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The Time Has Come for Us to Quit Playing Cuban Roulette

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By ROBERT C. KUARN

Lord knows, enough has been written about our criminal ineptitude in handling the Cuban situation, from earliest feeble fumbblings until tomorrow's newest baleful bulletin. But the time, I think, has come to quit playing political pool with it.



KUARN

Certainly, the time has come to quit making side-bar deals, under-the-table barter, with the furry frenetic who runs the country. The time has come to quit buying bodies back and forth with money and drugs and suggested tractors. The time has come to tell James Donovan to find another line of work; the time has come to tell Bobby Kennedy to keep his mouth shut and to quit hustling dough from admirers to make deals with.

The time has certainly come to cease and desist from allowing Miro Cardona, the disenchanting Castroite, from making loud statements about Jack Kennedy promising him an invasion with six divisions of troops. Absolutely, the time has come for the popularity-loving President to stop shooting off his mouth about recapturing Cuba for the Cubans unless he intends to send in a mess of Marines and planes and really knock off the joint.

And the time, most assuredly, has come for Americans to stop putting themselves in positions where bribery and barter must be implemented in order to buy them loose from Castro's jails. America should not really be in the anti-kidnaping business shaking down

products to leave in hollow trees in order to ransom the freedom of the kidnaped.

One of the great lines to come out of World War II was: "You can't do business with Hitler." You damned well can't do business with Castro. Somewhere you have to draw a line. Nobody ever really won even in the sordid racket of diplomacy, by trying to conduct trade on the level of the gangster. Eventually you have either to admit the swindle or call in the cops.

Cuba has been poison for America since we backtracked Castro against that cynical old perverter of right, Batista. Batista's perversion of right was calculated along the lines of the local crook who steals, bribes, occasionally murders a rival, but never really does anything rough enough against the Syndicate to start a gang war or attract the attention of the FBI.

Under the former sergeant Cuba was surface-prosperous. Havana was a jewel of a city; Varadero was a fine place to visit; the Guajiros who cut cane for penance went barefoot but their shoes were not entirely necessary anyhow, and at least they had a suckling pig, the local one, to add to his basic black beans on feast days. I.e., gambling, construction, rum, night clubs, fishing, mining, TV heaters, radio, sugar and sunshine all flourished.

Of the lot, about the only thing left is sunshine to recommend the country. The output of murder has certainly increased; there is a looming shortage in the prisons, heavy increase in Russians, Chinese, Czechs, secret police, unpaid informers, paid informers, and unpaid-for time on TV to allow Fidel an opportunity to conduct his usual five-hour fire-side chats.

We have crumbed up the Cuba deal from the beginning of recognition of Fidel, when he was an outlaw fighting against the limited sins of old Batista. We measured emigres from the Batista regime, and from all the other old cynical regimes of Machado, Grau, and the rest, in terms of means. Now, as the Spanish exile has it, we have made Cuba the largest country in the world. The capital is in Havana, the government is in Moscow, and all the people are in Miami.

I don't know what the Kennedy boys have in mind for Cuba, but it can't be very capable or even feasible, judging from the record. So far nothing the government has done has made any sort of sense, with the possible exception of the bluff Kennedy pulled against the Russians last fall, a gutsy bit of business which risked a nuclear war to make a point which never should have been allowed to sharpen itself in the first place. But one thing I do know: The time has come to quit operating on a conversational basis with Cuba. The time has come for Mr. Donovan, the Great Negotiator, to take a rest. And the time has come for Washington to tell the public what it has on its mind in reference to Cuba, for up to now all the public has generally been told it's been a pack of lies.